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Request for the inclusion of an additional item in the agenda of the sixty-first session

Commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade

Letter dated 29 September 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Saint Lucia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

In accordance with rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, I have the honour, on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Caribbean Community, to request the inclusion of an additional item in the agenda of the sixty-first session of the Assembly entitled "Commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade".

In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, an explanatory memorandum on the matter is attached (see annex I), as well as a draft resolution (see annex II).

(*Signed*) Anthony B. **Severin**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Saint Lucia

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Annex I

Explanatory memorandum submitted under rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly

The year 2007 will mark the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which started the process leading to the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. Some countries are already planning major events in 2007 to commemorate the event.[a]

The Chairman of the Group of 77, in a statement in the Third Committee during the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, drew attention to this anniversary and the expectation that the United Nations would appropriately recognize the event.

A special event by the United Nations in 2007 to commemorate this occasion will present an opportunity for the international community to honour the memory of the millions who died as a result of slavery, including during their transportation on the Middle Passage, in revolt and resistance to their enslavement. It will also serve as an opportunity to acknowledge the legacy of slavery as being at the heart of situations of profound social and economic inequality, hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice, which continue to affect people of African descent today.

Commemoration by the United Nations should also serve to correct the knowledge gap by highlighting both the consequences created by the slave trade and slavery as well as the interactions, past and present, between the peoples of Europe, Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean.

It is estimated that the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which lasted for almost 500 years, is responsible for the forced removal of millions[b] of persons, mostly from West Africa, to the "new world" of the Americas, including Brazil, the Caribbean, the United States and the Spanish Empire, as slaves to work mostly on producing sugar, cotton, tobacco and other products on plantations. This massive relocation has caused permanent and enormous damage to our ancestors and their descendants on every continent bordering the Atlantic. It led to depopulation and the stifling of African creativity and production and was the genesis of a dependency relationship with Europe.

It is estimated that about 13 per cent of Africans being transported on the Middle Passage died as a result of the rigours of the journey, and a further significant number died on account of resistance to slavery and rebellion. The real figures in both cases are unaccounted for.

Slavery and the slave trade are among the most serious violations of human rights in the history of humanity and will always remain the nadir of human brutality. Yet it took nearly 200 years for the international community to acknowledge it as a crime against humanity. Today the issue of reparations and compensation for the crime also remain outstanding.

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[a] Ghana and some States members of the Caribbean Community. Jamaica expects to engage in a year-long series of activities to acknowledge the event.

[b] The exact numbers are not known but are estimated to be between 11 million and 18 million.

Other recent situations of genocide, such as in Rwanda, Kosovo, Iraq and other parts of the world, the Holocaust, the forced trafficking of persons for economic gains and other like atrocities, reinforce the need for constant reminders and the need to educate and to ensure that such situations do not become a part of the "history of the future".

The States members of the Caribbean Community that are Members of the United Nations[c] hope that we can count on our friends and partners in the United Nations to help us commemorate an event that is at the core of our history and existence. We would very much appreciate your co-sponsorship of the draft resolution (see annex II).

[c] Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

Annex II

Draft resolution

Commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude and that slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms,

Recalling that the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which took place between the fifteenth and late nineteenth centuries, involved the forced transportation of millions of Africans as slaves, mostly from West Africa to the Americas, enriching the imperial empires of the time,

Honouring the memory of those who died as a result of slavery, including through exposure to the horrors of the Middle Passage and in revolt and resistance to enslavement,

Recognizing that the slave trade and slavery are among the worst violations of human rights in the history of humanity, bearing in mind their scale and duration,

Deeply concerned that it took the international community almost two hundred years to acknowledge slavery and the slave trade as a crime against humanity,

Recalling that slavery and the slave trade were declared as a crime against humanity by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 7 September 2001,

Acknowledging that the slave trade and the legacy of slavery are at the heart of situations of profound social and economic inequality, hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice, which continue to affect people of African descent today,

Reaffirming, therefore, the importance of the provision of effective remedies, recourse, redress and compensatory and other measures at the relevant levels aimed at countering the continued impact of slavery and the slave trade,

Recognizing the knowledge gap that exists with regard to the consequences created by the slave trade and slavery and on the interactions, past and present, generated among the peoples of Europe, Africa and the Americas, including the Caribbean,

Welcoming the work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization slave route project committee, which aims to correct this knowledge gap, and looking forward to the issuance of its report in due course,

Noting that 2007 will mark the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which significantly contributed to the abolition of slavery,

1. *Decides* to designate 25 March 2007 as the International Day for the Commemoration of the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to establish a programme of outreach with the involvement of Member States, civil society and non-governmental organizations, to appropriately commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, including a special activity in the General Assembly on the International Day for the Commemoration of the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade on 25 March 2007;

3. *Decides* to include an item in the agenda of the sixty-second session entitled "Commemoration of the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade", and in this regard requests the Secretary-General to submit a special report on initiatives by States to implement paragraphs 101 and 102 of the Durban Declaration adopted by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance aimed at countering the legacy of slavery and contributing to the restoration of the dignity of the victims of slavery and the slave trade.